

**THE PLIGHT OF BEING BLACK REFLECTED IN TATE
TAYLOR'S *THE HELP* MOVIE (2011):
A MARXIST APPROACH**

PUBLICATION ARTICLES



**Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for Getting Bachelor Degree of Education
in English Education Department**

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2013**



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TATE TAYLOR'S *THE HELP* MOVIE (2011): A
MARXIST APPROACH"

Naskah artikel tersebut, layak dan dapat disetujui untuk dipublikasikan.

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Surakarta, Februari 2013

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THE HELP MOVIE (2011):
A MARXIST APPROACH**

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ABSTRACT

DINA MAULIDA. A 320090255. THE PLIGHT OF BEING BLACK REFLECTED IN TATE TAYLOR'S THE HELP MOVIE (2011): A MARXIST APPROACH. RESEARCH PAPER. MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF SURAKARTA.

In this study is primarily proposed to analyze how the plight of being black reflected in Tate Taylor's The Help movie (2011) viewed from Marxist approach, and to analyze the movie based on its structural elements. In analyzing The Help movie, the writer conducts the study by using a descriptive qualitative study. There are two data source in this study, primary and secondary data. The primary data source is the play of The Help movie itself and the secondary data source are the sources that relate to the primary data, such as author's biography, books or e-books, journal, internet or any information relate the issue of this study "the plight of being black" and social background of American society in the middle twentieth century. The data are collected by using two kinds of technique, the first is note taking and the second is image capturing. The result of this study shows that there is the plight of being black in America at the 1960's period, and at the time in America happened the struggle to be equal for taking out from segregation era. In The Help movie (2011), Tate Taylor wants to show that this is the real life happened in America, and he wants people to know that there is no separated treatment in human although each people have different color, culture, ideology, and the like.

Keywords: *Being Black, The Help, Marxist Approach*

A. Introduction

1. Background of the Study

The plight is the situation of life that unpleasant or difficult, especially an unfavorable or unlucky one: to get oneself in a regretful plight. The plight here is about the plight of being black especially in America. Moreover, the plight of being black is so distressing for the reason that they have to complete the command of their white master. The blacks are always implicit as the inferior in the society. In along history, blacks are minority people who are underestimated by whites and they become poor people with the lack of knowledge and dexterity. The white people made the black people as their slaves. As the minorities in society, sometimes the blacks were treated unjustly by the whites. Many states conceded laws saying that black people and white people could not use the same facilities, such as schools, restaurants, parks, and public bathrooms. Such separating people based on their race, color, sex, religion, or age is called segregation. This condition makes the social distinction between the blacks and the whites. In generally, the blacks have been subtracted by the whites.

The Help is a 2011 American drama film adaptation of Kathryn Stockett's novel of the same name. This film was adapted for the screen and directed by Tate Taylor. The setting of *The Help* movie is in Jackson, Mississippi, and the stars Emma Stone as Skeeter, Viola Davis as Aibileen, Octavia Spencer as Minny, Bryce Dallas Howard as Hilly Holbrook, Jessica Chastain as Celia Foote, Sissy Spacek as Mrs. Walters, mother's Hilly Holbrook, and Allison Janney as Charlotte, mother's Skeeter. This film produced by Dream Works Studios and distributed by Touchstone Pictures.

There are four points that make this movie interesting to be analyzed. Firstly, *The Help* describes racial discrimination of African American family and white family. Secondly, *The Help* reflects cultural values of African American people in America. Thirdly, describes social background of America in 1960. Racism in the United States has been a major issue since the colonial era and the slave era. Finally, the present I will be a teacher later and this project is necessary to be carried out to widen, enlarge, and insert more knowledge to my professional

competence as teacher. So this is one of the requirements of being the professional teacher.

2. Literature Review

After the writer has looked for the literature review in many libraries especially in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta and in University in Central Java at least, she has not found the research about *The Help* movie done by the other researcher. So that the writer cannot compare this research with other research because this is the first study of *The Help* movie. The writer uses Marxist approach to analyze the data and using *The Help* movie as an object. The writer analyzes “The Plight of Being Black Reflected in Tate Taylor’s *The Help* Movie (2011) : A Marxist Approach”.

3. Problem Statement

The problem statement of the study is “How is the plight of being black reflected in Tate Taylor’s *The Help* movie (2011)?”

1. Limitation of the Study

The writer makes the research focuses on the analysis the plight of being black reflected in Tate Taylor’s *The Help* movie by employing a Marxist approach.

2. Objective of the Study

To analyze and describe the plight of being black reflected in Tate Taylor’s *The Help* movie based on the structural elements on the movie and Marxist criticism.

B. Research Method

In analyzing *The Help* movie, the researcher uses descriptive qualitative research for her research on Tate Taylor’s *The Help* movie (2011). The types of data of this study are the images and the text in *The Help* movie (2011). The data sources are books or any information related to the plight of being black that support the Marxist approach. The object of the study is *The Help* movie by Tate Taylor and was first premiered in 2011 by Dream Works Pictures. The writer uses note-taking and image-capturing as the method of collecting data in this research. In analyzing the data, the writer applies a descriptive approach. The steps taken by

the writer in analyzing the data are as follows: the first is analyzing the data based on its structural elements. The second step is analyzing the data based on Marxist perspective.

C. Research Finding and Discussion

In this research finding, the researcher determines some points to analyze *The Help* movie (2011) as follows:

1. Structural Elements Analysis of *The Help* movie

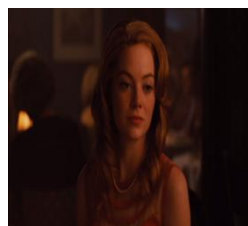
a. Narrative Elements

1) Character and Characterization

Major character is the most important character who always appears in the story of the movie.

a) Emma Stone as Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan

Skeeter is the major character in *The Help* movie. She is a single woman from a prominent family. She is a kind woman, but she does not care about her status to be a single because she just cares about her profession to be a great writer. Physically, she is a beautiful woman but she doesn't care about her performance. Mentally, she is not a coward for what she believes in her mind. She is a strong woman to face the conflict in her country between white people and colored people.



Mother's Skeeter	: Just take it in a little here. Little there. Get your hair fixed.
Skeeter	: I got a job today.
Mother's Skeeter	: Where?
Skeeter	: Writing for The Jackson Journal.
Mother's Skeeter	: Great. You can write my obituary! "Charlotte Phelan, dead! Her daughter, still single." Skeeter
	: Mother, would it really be so bad if I never met a husband? (Skeeter leaves her mother)
Mother's Skeeter	: Skeeter! Skeeter!

(TH, VCD 1 00:19:55 -00:20:25)

b) Viola Davis as Aibileen

Aibileen is also the major character in this film. She is a colored maid of Elizabeth. She is a good woman, she can control her

emotion to face the bad treatment of white people. She is a patient woman type. As the maid, she is a very kind with her employer. She always teaches good lesson to the child of employer, Mae Mobley. As like the dialogue shown below:



Aibileen : You is kind, you is smart...
you is important.
Aibileen & Mae : You is smart...
Smart...
you is kind...
you is kind...
you is important.
you is important.
Aibileen : That's so good. That's so good.

(TH, VCD 1 00:02:41-00:03:03)

c) Octavia Spencer as Minny

Minny is also the major character. She is the mother of five children. Physically, she is fat and has binded hair. And for the mentally, she is confrontational friend of Aibileen because she always tells about her employers to Aibileen, good or bad, but her habit is to tell about bad treatment that she gets. Actually, she is also a good woman.



Minny : Forgive me, Lord,
but I'm gonna have to kill that woman,
Aibileen. Now she gone to putting pencil
marks on my toilet paper.
Aibileen : Did she?
Minny : Mm-hm.
But I carry paper in from my own
damn house. That fool don't know.
Aibileen : Miss Leefolt got so much hairspray on her
head she gonna blow us all up if she light a
cigarette.
Minny : And you know she will!

(TH, VCD 1 00:10:11-00:10:35)

Minor character is character who stars as protagonist or antagonist actor. Minor character doesn't always appear in the whole of the story but they appear just in several scene.

a) Bryce Dallas Howard as Hilly Holbrook

Physically, she is a beautiful woman with the brown hair. She is a white woman with slanting eyes. She is tall woman and she is neat. For

the mentally, she is so brave in the public meeting. And she will do anything to separate the toilet between hers and her colored maid because she thinks that black people will take different diseases pass through the bathroom.



Hilly : A disease-preventative bill that requires every white home to have a separate bathroom for the colored help. It's been endorsed by the White Citizens' Council.

(TH, VCD 1 00:15:32-00:16:00)

b) Ahna O'Reilly as Elizabeth Leefolt

In *The Help* movie Elizabeth is also the minor character. She is the employer of Aibileen. Actually she is a good woman, but she is too afraid to Hilly Holbrook as her friend. She is influenced to underestimate the black people.



Elizabeth : Hilly, I wish you'd just go use the bathroom.
Hilly :I'm fine.
Mrs. Walters :Oh, she's just upset because the nigra uses the guest bath and so do we.
Elizabeth : Aibileen, go check on Mae Mobley.
Aibileen : Yes, ma'am.
Elizabeth : Just go use mine and Raleigh's.
Hilly : If Aibileen uses the guest bath, I'm sure she uses yours, too.
Elizabeth : She does not.

(TH, VCD 1 00:14:59-00:15:22)

c) Jessica Chastain as Celia Foote

Physically, she is a sexy and beautiful woman. Her hair is short and blonde. She is so sexy in fashion. So many white people get jealous for her. For mentally, she is not arrogant and simple. She has a problem with Hilly. Hilly has misunderstanding in giving judge for Celia Foote because Hilly thinks that Celia has grabbed Hilly's ex-boyfriend but Celia always wants to give Hilly explanation.



Hilly : You liar! Who did you tell?
Celia : Hilly, I got pregnant after you and Johnny broke up!
Mrs. Walters : Oh, shit!
Hilly : Shut up, Mother!

Celia : Johnny never cheated on you. At least not with me.

(TH, VCD 2 01:44:57-01:45:10)

2) Plot

a) The Beginning

In the beginning of the plot *The Help* movie looks Aibileen shares her story during be maid, and being Elizabeth's maid to Skeeter. Actually she is so afraid, because she can't imagine if Elizabeth knows about it that she tell a story about her during be her maid.

b) The Middle

In the middle plot of *The Help* movie, Skeeter writes a controversial book with Minny and Aibileen's stories during being maid for white families and sends it to Miss Stein as an editor for harper & Row in New York city.

c) The End

In the end plot of *The Help* movie, finally, the controversial book written by Skeeter is accepted for publication and it's so successful. Many maids are so happy and also Skeeter. Skeeter shares her royalties with the maids who also contributed to finish her book

3) Setting

a) Setting of Place

Aibileen's Kitchen, The Jackson Journal, Garden of Phelan's House, Aibileen's living room.



b) Setting of Time

Summer Season, The process of writing in the evening, Rainy Season.



4) Point of View

In *The Help* movie, the point of view uses the first person or narrator. In this movie, Aibileen as narrator and she is a major character in *The Help* movie. *The Help* movie is started by a story about Aibileen, that's told herself when she is interviewing by Skeeter. She shares about her story during being maid for white family to Skeeter as the writer that will write a controversial book about the maids in Jackson, Mississippi.

5) Theme

A theme of *The Help* movie (2011) is racial, it is about "There is no human that can stand to get bad treatment in the life although it's the minority or majority of the society".

b. Technical Elements

1) *Mise-en-Scene*

a) Setting

The setting in *The help* movie (2011) can be combined with of properties and dressing in this movie. It can be seen how the characters dress and the setting properties.



The Way to
Jackson Journal



Meeting of White People



Restaurant

2) Casting

The characters of *The Help* movie (2011) is casted by Kerry Barden and Paul Schnee. Both of them choose the suitable characters for *The Help* movie (2011) such as Emma Stone as Skeeter Phelan, Viola Davis as Aibileen, Octavia Spencer as Minny, Bryce Dallas Howard as Hilly Holbrook, Jessica Chastain as Celia Foote, Ahna O'Reilly as Elizabeth Leefolt, and many others.

3) Costume and Make-up

The costume who worn by the actress and actors in *The Help* movie is American style in 1960's period. It is old style. The major character is Skeeter Phelan. She always dresses for her activity.



Skeeter's Complete
Costume



Skeeter's Daily
Costume



Skeeter's Dinner Costume

4) Lighting

In this movie, there are several scenes shown that there is a difference in using lighting:

a) Intensity or brightness to make the movie more alive and interesting. It can be dark lighting and bright lighting.



Intensity or Brightness



Intensity or Brightness

b) Color

In *The Help* movie, color can be found in many scenes. The color itself such as white, brown, blue and many others effects used to make the movie more realistic and natural when the film happened.



Brown Color



White Color

c) Direction

There are several light placed that can be seen in *The Help* movie (2011). They are the frontal, top, side and under lighting.



The Frontal Light



Top Lighting



Side Lighting

d) Source or Form

In *The Help* movie, there are several of the source or form the light comes. The source or form the light comes from the sunshine in the morning light that shot in the front of Elizabeth's house. And it can be seen the light comes from the moonlight in the night and the other lamp in the railway. As like the screen captured below:



Sunshine



Moonlight

2) Cinematography

a) Photographic Qualities of the Shot

In *The Help* movie (2011), there is a representative in transform perspective. It is when Skeeter imagined the past time with Constantine, the colored maid of her family, the picture changes from the brightness to rather dark so it indicates that the changes of the time when she is young with Constantine.



Photographic Qualities of the Shot



Photographic Qualities of the Shot

b) Framing of the Shot

(1) Angle

There some categories of angle, they are straight angle, high angle, and low angle. This movie uses the three categories of those:



Straight Angle



High Angle



Low Angle

(2) Distance

The distance of framing can be categorized into Extreme Long Shot, Long Shot, Medium Long Shot, Medium Shot, Medium Close Up, and Extreme Close Up.



Extreme Long Shot



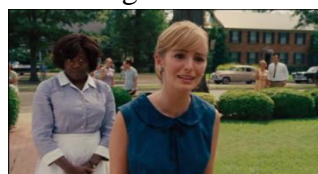
Long Shot



Medium Long Shot



Medium Shot



Medium Close Up



Extreme Close

c) Duration of the Shot

The duration of *The Help* movie (2011) is about 138 minutes. In this movie, the director uses the major character “Aibileen” as narrator. *The Help* movie is so interesting and easy to be understood because it tells about the plight of being black in America at the 1960’s period with the good chronological.

c. Sound

In *The Help* movie (2011) the music supervisor is Jennifer Hawks that consist of re-recording mixers are Scott Millan and David Giammarco, production sound mixer is Willie Burton, Cas, sound utility is Adam Mohundro. In *The Help* movie (2011) uses instrumental music like as 1960’s era. It very help to make the movie back to in 1960’s period. They use instrumental such as “The Living Proof”, “Jackson”, and etc.

d. Editing

Axis of action or the 180° line consists of a person walking, two people conversing, a car racing along a road is assumed to project along a discernible and predictable line (Bordwell and Thompson, 1990:218). In *The Help* movie (2011), this situation reflected when Skeeter and Aibileen talk about together and Aibileen shares her story while she is working for white families. Meanwhile, establishing shot is when Skeeter applies for job in Jackson Journal. It shows a room of the editor of Jackson Journal, Mr. Harold Blackly. While a reverse shot is when Skeeter and Aibileen look each other during processing writing Skeeter’s book. This reverse shot takes the object what Skeeter looks at (Aibileen) and Aibileen looks at (Skeeter). Then, reestablishing shot is when Stuart stands up when talks to Skeeter. And it’s clear that Stuart wants to explain to Skeeter about something. In *The Help* movie is also reflected this situation when Celia Foote walks to Hilly’s sitting in the event of auction because at te time Hilly wins the auction of chocolate pie’s Minny. Finally, cross cutting in *The Help* movie is also reflected this situation when Skeeter imagines the past time when Skeeter with Constantine. In this scene is seen clearly that the changes scene shows the past time and continues the present.

2. Marxist Approach Analysis

a. Karl Marx's Marxist Approach

According to Suseno (2001:5), "Marxism is the term for ideology about the relation between economic, social and political concept". While according to Forgacs (1986:166), "Marxism is a living body of thought and a set of real political practices and can operate on the assumption that literature can be properly understood only within a larger framework of social reality."

In *The Help* movie (2011) reflects the Marxist approach of Karl Marx. The plight of being black as the issue of this movie shows the aspects of Marxist theory. In this film can be found some dialectical materialism that's had by the major character because they struggle to against the oppressor. Historical materialism can be reflected in *The Help* movie (2011) story. It is can be seen in the form of its characters and characterization, setting and style. In this movie, the character is divided into two groups, those are the white people as high social class and colored people as low social class.

In *The Help* movie (2011), there is struggle that done by the oppressed class. But in this movie, the struggle is done by Skeeter as high class woman. And the colored maid, Aibileen and Minny. And then, there is result of struggle that's done by Skeeter, Aibileen, Minny and other maids. In this situation, after Skeeter writes the bad treatment that's done by white people for colored people, the result is coming. After it, there is scene that the lower class be alienated because they struggle to white people as high class. In this film, the characters get alienation are Minny, Yule Mae and Aibileen.

b. Basic Concept of Being Black

The concept of being black is also analyzed in this movie. The concept of being black is also analyzed in this movie. There are some result of the analyses. Firstly, Materialist Orientation reflects a physical-material objectification emphasis in life (emphasis on physical characteristics, clothes, money, things, etc). Materialist orientation is detected to be the plight of being black as the issue in this movie. In this situation, physical-material emphasis in this movie, it can be seen in the characters of Yule Mae, Aibileen and Minny. They are as the colored

maids gets the bad treatment from white person. Secondly, Individualist Orientation reflects an I/Me emphasis in life. In *The Help* movie (2011), the individualist orientation elaborated about the issue of *The Help* movie (2011) is the plight of being black shows. In this situation, the individualist is got by Skeeter, she is emphasis in herself to write the controversial book. Then, got by Aibileen and Minny, they are emphasis in themselves to reveal the truth of their feeling during working as the colored maid for white family. It is the beginning of the problem of segregation end.

Thirdly, Alien-Self Orientation reflects a general Eurocentric values emphasis in one's self-concept and general approach to life. In *The Help* movie (2011), alien-self orientation in this movie is happened when the first of the entire problem happened. From the separate bathroom, and accused Aibileen as the thief. It is the plight of being black in this film. Fourthly, Anti-Self Orientation reflects the Alien-Self emphasis along with negativity and hostility toward Blackness/Africanity. In *The Help* movie (2011), there are some scene that shows anti-self orientation. Anti-self orientation itself tells about the hostility for the blackness. And it's really happened in America 1960's period. But actually in that era is happened the segregation era.

Fifthly, Self-Destructive Orientation reflects an emphasis on self-group injurious and anti-social and/or criminal thoughts and behaviors. In *The Help* movie (2011), there are some scene that shows self-destructive orientation. Self-destructive in *The Help* movie (2011) itself shows the plight of being black as the issue in this movie also reflect the anti social or criminal that's in this movie. It's happened when Yule Mae is arrested by the policemen, Mae Mobley is been angry by her mother because mother's thought about closet that will be delivered the serious disease and the nigger got shot so the colored people in the bus have to be off.. Sixthly, Integration Orientation reflects a dominant emphasis on the inclusion/involvement of non-Blacks (namely Whites) in one's life. In *The Help* movie (2011), there are some scene that shows integration orientation. In the formulation about integration orientation in *The Help* movie (2011), there is an

integration orientation between Skeeter with Aibileen, Hilly with Elizabeth, and Celia Foote with Minny.

There are some result of the analyses. The result of this study shows that there is the plight of being black in America at the 1960's period, and at the time in America happened the struggle to be equal for taking out from segregation era. In *The Help* movie (2011), Tate Taylor wants to show that this is the real life happened in America, and he wants people to know that there is no separated treatment in human although each people have different color, culture, ideology, and the like.

D. Conclusion

In *The Help* movie (2011), the writer analyses this film using Marxist approach. After analyzing this movie using Marxist approach, the writer gets the following conclusions:

First, based on the structural analysis of *The Help* movie (2011) directed Tate Taylor as the literary work, the analyze of structural elements can make into a good part of this research paper. In choosing all of the need in this movie is appropriate so the viewer can interest to watch this movie. Tate Taylor wants to convey to the viewer that this is reality of the condition of America in the 1960's period through the major characters. And *The Help* movie shows the condition of Jackson, Mississippi. At the time, there is struggle of black people to come out from segregation. And the moral message that wants conveyed by the director, he wants to give people to know that there is no separated treatment in human, although each people have different skin, culture, ideology, etc. In this movie, White people give responses, opinions, and sympathy and discrimination to the low class or colored people condition in that time.

Second, *The Help* movie also shows the struggle of the colored people and also a white woman. They are struggle the white people that's too racial the different skin, actually the feelings being black people. Skeeter as white woman gives the respect for it and she is struggles by writing a controversial book view as the colored maid with helping from Aibileen, Minny for the first maid who interviewed by Skeeter and also the other colored maid.

Third, in *The Help* movie (2011) Tate Taylor also gives the effect of the reaction that is elaborated on the second conclusion. There is a good effect for good efforts. Nevertheless, there is a bad effect on the bad ways in the social. Furthermore, the colored people also get surprise from the effort of Aibileen, especially, because she is so influence to other colored people to help writing controversial book by Skeeter. Aibileen and Minny gets awards from the other colored people for their brave. And Skeeter also gets the job in New York. It's the good result from their effort.

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